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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

DIALOGUE SESSIONS WITH MAJOR GROUPS

# Summary report of the dialogue session with local authorities

(16 April 1997)

Chairman: Ambassador Bagher Asadi, (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-Chairman, Commission on Sustainable Development

Facilitators: Mr. Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi, World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination (WACLAC)

Mr. Jeb Brugman, International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI)

Presenters: Representatives and mayors of the following organizations and/or municipalities made presentations: World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination (WACLAC); Dubai Municipality; Policy Committee, Corporation of London, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; City of Marrakech, Morocco; Barcelona, Spain; Cajamarca Municipality/Association of Peruvian Municipalities; Leicester City Council, United Kingdom; and International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI).

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PRESENTATIONS

Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro, local authorities have been actively implementing their responsibilities as identified in Agenda 21. More than 1,800 local authorities from 64 countries have established Local Agenda 21 processes. They are working to reorganize themselves and change mindsets and practices in order to become more effective agents of sustainable development. They are establishing new mechanisms for international cooperation with each other and the United Nations system, as attested, for example, by the establishment of WACLAC. In their 1995 meeting with the Commission on Sustainable Development, local authorities called for greater recognition of their key role in sustainable development. In contrast, they are now focusing on the key issues and obstacles with respect to implementing Agenda 21 at the local level.

Activities

Local authorities from around the world spoke about Local Agenda 21 initiatives in their communities. These efforts are described below.

- Local authorities have been heavily involved with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

- The United Arab Emirates have developed a best practices competition to encourage sustainable development activities.

- The City of London has undertaken a number of Local Agenda 21 initiatives. A focal point of its efforts involves steering groups and task forces comprising a wide range of stakeholders. These groups have developed and launched plans on a number of Agenda 21 issues including energy, health and the natural environment. The City of London has also established a green belt to ensure open spaces; created the first smoke control zone; increased use of public transport; launched an environmental forum on environmental risk management; and undertaken a major regeneration study. Other London-based programmes are providing support to local authorities in Africa and examining sustainability indicators.

- Development of a sanitation programme in Marrakech involved national/local government cooperation, a tax financing programme, citizen participation and privatization. Other Marrakech projects are providing housing to low income people and restoring historic sites in Marrakech.

- Barcelona is working to implement Agenda 21 via a consensus-building forum. Components of the Barcelona process include decentralization and citizen participation.

- Leicester City Council reported on a national campaign for Local Agenda 21. This campaign provides training, guidance, research and technical support to local authorities and communities for Local Agenda 21 planning and implementation. The campaign has recruited 75 per cent of local authorities to establish a multisectoral forum to oversee planning of Local

Agenda 21 implementation. The campaign has also resulted in a survey, which indicates considerable progress concerning awareness and implementation of Agenda 21 throughout the United Kingdom.

- In countries such as the United Kingdom and Sweden, national campaign are proving instrumental in implementing Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

Obstacles

Local authorities highlighted the obstacles they face in implementing Local Agenda 21. These obstacles include lack of political will; insufficient resources; absence of partnerships; and policies that promote unsustainable practices. Specific difficulties include those described below.

- Partnerships between national and local governments are often underdeveloped.

- In some cases, national Governments and their policies pose the most important barriers to Local Agenda 21 implementation. These obstacles include lack of interest in and attention to Agenda 21; absence of integrated transportation policies; unsustainable energy policies; lack of tax raising powers; and poor enforcement of environmental laws.

- Subsidies that encourage unsustainable practices also pose problems in many countries.

- Banking institutions often overlook the social value of agriculture programmes which are in urgent need of financial assistance.

Priorities

The priorities outlined by local authorities reflect the obstacles they wish to overcome. Suggestions by local authorities include calls for enhanced local/national partnerships; capacity-building; attention to Agenda 21 and Habitat II objectives; and information networks. More detailed priorities are listed below.

- Develop and enhance partnerships between local and subnational governments, as well as national Governments, to create incentives and overcome disincentives to sustainable practices at the local level.

- Support development of political will to address sustainability issues.

- Build capacities of local authorities particularly in the area of finance, and provide powers equal to responsibilities.

- Legalize and formalize the relationship between the United Nations and international organizations of local authorities.

- Encourage local governments to be proactive through development of strategic plans.

- Increase harmonization of fiscal policy, and the internalization of social and environmental costs.

- Integrate the provisions of Habitat II and Agenda 21.

DIALOGUE

Representatives of the following Governments made statements during the dialogue session: Australia, China, Netherlands, France, Peru, Philippines, Sweden, United States of America. Statements were also made by the representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and by the representative of a non-governmental organization (Brazil).

Several government representatives emphasized the importance of the dialogue with local authorities and acknowledged that the challenge for sustainability ultimately lay within the world's cities (United States, Netherlands).

One government representative noted that local authorities should aim to assist the United Nations rather than seek assistance from it (France). A panellist responded that local authorities should work to ensure that WACLAC became a permanent body, formally recognized by the United Nations. Another panellist noted that local authorities should have a louder voice in the international community in order to ensure balanced partnerships.

Several government representatives discussed Local Agenda 21 initiatives in their countries. One representative described projects concerning lake management, health and strategic development plans (Philippines). Another representative mentioned sustainable development pilot projects in his country (China). Grass-roots groups, non-governmental organizations and other major group representatives have been especially important in sustainable development efforts (Sweden). Australia will be hosting an international conference entitled "Pathways to Sustainability" in Newcastle (1-5 June 1997). That conference will showcase case studies of local initiatives and make a contribution to the special session of the General Assembly (Australia).

One panellist called for a network that would enable local authorities to share experiences and information. One non-governmental organization representative noted the need to coordinate programmes such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Capacity 21 with Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

One government representative commented that local authority proposals did not pay adequate attention to public participation in Local Agenda 21 implementation processes and stressed the importance of engaging private sector representatives early in the process of Local Agenda 21 implementation (United States). Panellists acknowledged that many groups were involved including educators, non-governmental organizations and the private sector and that participation was the foundation of the Local Agenda 21 process. Particular assistance is required to achieve greater private sector participation in Local Agenda 21 activities.

## CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Challenges and recommendations for the Commission on Sustainable Development are aimed at strengthening partnerships among local, subnational and national levels, examining obstacles and promoting decentralization. Local authorities highlighted the following challenges and recommendations.

- National campaigns: Local Agenda 21 programmes should be actively encouraged in each country, particularly through establishment of Local Agenda 21 national campaigns in partnership with local authority associations.

- Global targets and overcoming obstacles: The Commission on Sustainable Development should establish global targets to encourage Local Agenda 21 campaigns, and to review and address obstacles to Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

- Fresh water: The international community should provide an enabling environment that encourages subnational and local authorities (with investments from public and private sources) to extend and increase efficiency of water supply and sanitation services, especially in fast-growing urban areas and poor rural communities.

- Decentralization: Trends towards decentralization of government to local levels should be recognized and support should be given to local authorities to assist in implementation of their new governance and service provision responsibilities.

- Study of national barriers to Local Agenda 21 implementation: Other proposals requested the Commission on Sustainable Development to commission a study that examined barriers (especially those erected and maintained by national Governments) to Local Agenda 21 implementation. Barriers may concern transportation, energy, tax policies, subsidies and poor enforcement of regulations.

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